

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT O 02381 161930Z
ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2824
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, TD
SUBJECT: SHAH FAILS IN BID TO REGAIN THE POST OF LEADER
OF THE OPPOSITION

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 1397 AND 1942

1. SUMMARY. SEVERAL MONTHS OF JOCKEYING BY FORMER LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, RAFFIQUE SHAH, AIMED AT REGAINING THAT POST FROM THE PRESENT INCUMBENT, BASDEO PANDAY, CULMINATED AUGUST 11 IN A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CLARKE WHICH CONFIRMED THE STATUS QUO. THE PRESIDENT HAS CONSIDERABLE DISCRETION UNDER THE CONSTITUTION IN THE APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION AND CHOSE TO STICK WITH PANDAY, EVEN THOUGH SHAH APPEARED TO HAVE THE SUPPORT OF A LARGER NUMBER OF OPPOSITION MPS. BY DECLINING TO REAPPOINT SHAH AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, CLARKE CLEARLY HAS STRENGTHENED PANDAY'S PREVIOUSLY TENUOUS HOLD ON THAT POSITION. THUS FORTIFIED, PANDAY NOW CAN BE EXPECTED TO PRESS FOR THE OUSTER OF SHAH AND HIS SUPPORTERS FROM PARLIAMENT ON THE GROUNDS THAT ONLY THE PANDAY FACTION REPRESENTS THE OPPOSITION UNITED LABOR FRONT. END SUMMARY.
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2. AFTER MONTHS OF MANEUVERING BY RAFFIQUE SHAH TO REGAIN THE OFFICIAL LEADERSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION, BY LATE JULY HE FINALLY APPEARED TO HAVE THE SUPPORT OF A CLEAR MAJORITY OF THOSE MPS WHO DO NOT SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT. ON THE STRENGTH OF THAT SUPPORT, HE REQUESTED A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CLARK TO DISCUSS THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION. FOLLOWING

THEIR MEETING ON AUGUST 11, SHAH'S ONLY PUBLIC COMMENT WAS THAT THERE WAS NO CHANGE IN THE LEADERSHIP PICTURE AND THAT HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO RUN THE POST DOWN WITH A BIG STICK. AT AN AUGUST 15 PRESS CONFERENCE, HOWEVER, SHAH CHARGED THAT CLARKE WAS "PLAYING POLITICS" IN RETAINING PANDAY AND SAID THAT IF THE PRESIDENT COULD NOT UPHOLD THE CONSTITUTION, HE SHOULD RESIGN OR BE REMOVED.

3. UNDER THE CONSTITUTION THE PRESIDENT HAS CONSIDERABLE DISCRETION IN THE APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION. WITHOUT BEING PRIVY TO THE PRESIDENT'S THINKING IN THE PRESENT CASE, ONE CAN AT LEAST SURMISE THAT HE CHOSE TO RETAIN PANDAY PRIMARILY BECAUSE FORMER ARMY REBELLION LEADER SHAH STILL IS ANATHEMA TO PM WILLIAMS AND THE RULING PNM, WHILE PANDAY DOES NOT APPEAR TO POSE A THREAT AND HAS PROVED TO BE A MAN WITH WHOM THE GOVERNMENT CAN WORK. AS IF TO UNDERLINE THIS LATTER POINT, WILLIAMS MET WITH PANDAY FOR 75 MINUTES ON AUGUST 11 TO DISCUSS "MATTERS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE," WHEREAS THE PM NEVER ONCE CONFERRED WITH SHAH DURING SHAH'S TIME AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION.

4. WHILE IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT BEING LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION AT PRESENT, WHEN GOVERNMENT MPS OUTNUMBER THE OPPOSITION 23 TO 13 AND THE OPPOSITION ITSELF IS SPLIT SEVERAL WAYS, MEANS LITTLE OR NOTHING, THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE IN FACT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAS MORE THAN SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE. UNDER NEW LEGISLATION PASSED IN APRIL, 1978, ANY MP ELECTED WITH THE SUPPORT OF A POLITICAL PARTY SHALL LOSE HIS SEAT IF HE RESIGNS OR IS EXPELLED FROM THAT PARTY. PANDAY ALREADY HAS "EXPELLED" THE SHAH FACTION FROM THE ULF AND NOW CAN BE EXPECTED TO STEP UP EFFORTS TO OUST SHAH AND COMPANY FROM PARLIAMENT. THE OUTCOME OF THOSE EFFORTS, HOWEVER, IS FAR FROM CERTAIN; SHAH UNDOUBTEDLY WILL CLAIM THAT HIS FACTION IS THE "TRUE" ULF. AS HE IS UNLIKELY TO BOW OUT WITHOUT A FIGHT, THE ISSUE APPEARS HEADED EVENTUALLY FOR THE COURTS. IN ANY EVENT, A LENGTHY, DIFFICULT STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE TWO FACTIONS SHOULD BE EXPECTED, A STRUGGLE WHICH CANNOT BUT DETRACT FURTHER FROM THE OPPOSITION'S ALREADY MINIMAL EFFECTIVENESS IN PARLIAMENT AND FROM ANY PUBLIC CREDIBILITY THE ULF MAY STILL HAVE AS A POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT. O'MAHONY

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Message Attributes

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Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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